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ABSTRACT

Among the characteristics of training (such as cross-cultural training) that differentiate it from traditional classroom education are its attention to how adults learn, preference for the experiential approach, emphasis on "learning how to learn," and tailoring to meet individual needs. Seven issues are considered to be most important in current cross-cultural training: (1) Different approaches are appropriate for different cultures. The current United States approach, for example, is inappropriate for non-Westerners. (2) Hidden but obtrusive cultural assumptions underlie all statements and actions; for example, Americans' concepts of fate, change, and equality are very different from those of non-Westerners. (3) Both generic training and training about specific countries is necessary. (4) The content presented in training must not be considered secondary to the training process. (5) Behavioral objectives should be incorporated in training. (6) Trainers need to deal with such obstacles to learning as trainees' needs for logistic information and the tendency to believe that all people are basically alike. (Three difficult cross-cultural training situations are described and questions are presented to guide in discussing them.) (GW)

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"ISSUES IN CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING"

by Robert Kohls
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International Communication Agency
Washington, D. C.

Plenary Session

Second Summer Conference on
Intercultural Communication

University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

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Abstract:

"Training" is distinguished from "education", and ten characteristic features of training are enumerated.

Seven issues, some developing out of ethical concerns and others relating more to professional standards, are then presented:

1. Different approaches appropriate for different cultures

2. The hidden but very obtrusive cultural assumptions that underlie all our statements and all our actions

3. The generic vs. specific argument

4. The content vs. "process" argument

5. The debate as to whether behavioral objectives can or should be imposed onto cross-cultural training

6. Disincentives to cross-cultural learning

7. The need for materials development

In the breakout session, three specially developed case studies were used to discuss various considerations of different training situations.

While learning and education have been with us for a very long time, "training" is a relatively new activity. It has only been considered a field since about 1965. The activities and approaches which are implied by "training" are not immediately understood by everyone who hears the word. To many people, training is something done to dogs, or something athletes are "in", or something which is associated with the toilet habits of small children.

Understood or not, training has sparked a major learning industry, has had broad effects on human resource development in the private sector, and has greatly affected the learning methodology used in all but the most conservative educational institutions at all levels in America. Significantly, too, training has been associated with cross-cultural learning since training's inception in the mid-1960s.

In this paper I will discuss what I consider to be seven important issues in cross-cultural training; some of these will derive from ethical concerns, and some will relate to professional standards. Before we look at these seven issues, however, I feel it is necessary to elucidate some of the essential characteristics of training.

Much has been made of the differences between "education" and "training". I am aware that the distinctions between the two are becoming blurred and that many of the activities formerly associated with training have been borrowed freely by educators during the past decade. This borrowing should be encouraged. As "educational technology" replaces the "teacher training" approach, perhaps the two disciplines will eventually merge into one. The classical and still probably the most definitive comparison of "education" and "training" is that presented by Roger Harrison and Richard Hopkins in their 1967 article, "The Design of Cross-Cultural Training: An Alternative to the University Model."* Those who want a more complete definition of training are referred to that article.

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*Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 3, #4, pp. 431-461.

To complicate the issue further, many trainers discovered the man who was to become their guru, Malcolm Knowles, in the School of Education at Boston University. His book The Modern Practice of Adult Education was published in 1970, but it was not generally known to trainers until the mid-1970s.* It presents the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the field.

Some of the characteristics which distinguish training from traditional classroom education are:

1) An awareness of the different approaches which are most appropriate to the teaching of content, those which can best transfer skills, and those which can affect attitudinal changes. (It is in this latter area that training is often most effective.)

2) Special attention to how adults learn. These findings are based on a large body of research in the behavioral sciences. The main points are: Adults like to be treated like adults; they learn most rapidly when they know why they should learn and "buy into" the process; they are willing to take responsibility; they don't like surprises; they don't like to be embarrassed (and they don't like embarrassing situations); they like to know where they stand at all times. This latter practice has popularized the computer term "feedback". To be effective, feedback must be frequent and frank.

3) A strong preference for the experiential approach. "Hands-on" learning and actual practice, whenever appropriate, is used. The inductive approach, where experience precedes "telling", is preferred. (Some trainers would not even "tell" after the experience but would skillfully pull the responses from their trainees.)

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*Published by Association Press, New York.

4) The development of a large number of learn-methodologies, activities, techniques, "structured experiences", and "instrumented exercises."*

5) Emphasis on "learning how to learn", which is considered far more valuable than learning a specific body of knowledge.

6) The Systems Approach applied to the development of the training program. **

7) Tailoring to meet the unique needs of individual trainees.

8) Special attention paid to the sequence and mix of training activities.

9) Emphasis given to the "processing" of experiential learn activities. This is usually done in small group discussions (eight or ten is considered an ideal size; never more than 12) where the trainer helps each trainee express what he or she experienced or learned in the activity. It is not

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*ICA's in-house manual, Methodologies for Trainers: A Compendium of Learning Strategies, lists over 100 such methodologies. (This manual is available from the ICA Training and Development Division upon request.)
William Pfeiffer and John Jones have developed a dozen books of training exercises (six volumes in their Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training series and six volumes, to date, in their Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators (1972 to present). These are available from University Associates, 7596 Eads Ave., La Jolla, California.
SIETAR has a similar volume now in press: It is to be titled Intercultural Sourcebook: Cross-Cultural Training Methodologies and will be available from The Intercultural Network, 906 North Spring Ave., La Grange Park, Illinois.

**Many variations on the Systems Approach are readily available, but I would be willing to share my own 24-step system with anyone who requests it.

sufficient merely to present one exciting, involving experiential exercise after another without such "processing" to fix the learnings in the minds of the trainees.

10) The trainer becomes the central figure in the training program. Trainers must have a natural charisma and a human concern for the trainees which is immediately apparent to all. They are most generally called "facilitators", indicating their role is to facilitate learning, not to pose as a learned scholar who presents his/her vast knowledge in eloquent lectures to the trainees. The trainer functions more in the role of coach or guide than as "leader". For American cross-cultural training programs, it is essential that the trainer have overseas living experience in the target country, and that his/her attitude toward the country be positive.

Now with our definition of the essential components of training out of the way, we can turn to the topic of this paper -- the seven issues which I consider to be the most important ones in the cross-cultural training field today:

1. Different approaches are appropriate for different cultures. Stated another way, the current American approach to training is radical and absolutely inappropriate for seven-eighths of the world.

Let me illustrate the point by comparing the current American approach with the reactions and expectations of a more "traditional" society:*

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* I am indebted to Pierre Casse of the World Bank for these examples.

	The Current American Approach Holds That:	A More "Traditional" Society Would Likely Expect:
(1)	The trainees are responsible for their own learning. They should determine what they need to learn. (Heuristic approach)	The trainer should be the expert, and he/she should act the part. He/she should tell the trainees what they need to know. The trainees couldn't assess their own needs even if they wanted to. How could they "know what they don't know?" To admit they didn't already know would be to admit they had shortcomings and would cause a loss of "face".
(2)	Training objectives are absolutely crucial in planning and organizing the learning process. Behavioral change can best be accomplished through carefully constructed, behaviorally stated, performance-based objectives.	Establishing training objectives is perceived as a threat by the trainee -- for if they were not able to reach those objectives, they would have <u>failed</u>. Besides, clearcut, written objectives prevent flexibility in the learning process. The only meaningful evaluation is that of the <u>trainer's</u> performance.
(3)	"Learning by doing" is the most effective technique. Learning through experimentation is strongly encouraged.	Trainees learn by observing the trainer and modeling their behavior on his/hers. "Learning by doing" is too risky and too inefficient. Exercises and simulations make us expose ourselves and make us look foolish. The trainer should tell us (out of his own experience) the right way to do the things we need to know how to do.

In short, the American approach (reflected in the experiential direction so favored in training) works only for Westerners. Unfortunately, many American trainers do not realize this.

If more than one culture is involved in a training program, these differences must be taken into account. *

2. We need to be aware of the hidden but very obtrusive cultural assumptions that underlie all our statements and all our actions. I will mention only three as examples, but be warned that the cross-cultural training world is riddled with them. HumRRO,** in developing its "contrast American" approach, identified over 60 such significant differences.

   (1) The concept of "Fate"

   Americans find it difficult even to imagine how seriously most of the world considers the role fate plays in their lives. To us it seems like superstition, to be avoided at all cost. Americans find it both difficult and repugnant to accept the fact that there are some things (actually many things) which lie beyond the power of man to achieve.

   Seven-eighths of the world believes religiously in the concept of Fate. This all-pervasive concept literally rules their lives. Fate controls who you are and what you will become. You can't move out of the social level into which you were born.

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*This is the main point made in the three case studies (attached) which were used in the breakout session following the Plenary Session.

**Human Resources Research Organization, Alexandria, Virginia.

Americans, on the other hand, don't know this is the case, so they procede as if FATE didn't exist -- as if there were no limitations -- and move from one level of society to the next higher level, and to the next, and the next.

For many Americans, there is nothing beyond the power of Man. We have brought nature into control. This room, for example can, through the marvels of air conditioning and central heating, be maintained at the same constant temperature year round, regardless of the outside climate. We have literally gone to the moon, because we couldn't accept the limitation that we couldn't. We seem to be challenged to do, by one means or another (and often at great cost), what seven-eighths of the world knows can't be done.

(2) The concept of "change"

We think change is automatically a good thing. Change, to us is synonymous with growth, evolution, improvement, development, and progress. Not so with seven-eighths of the world. For seven-eighths of the world, change is not a positive force, not something considered desirable, but a destructive force, and one which should be avoided.

The positive alternatives to change are difficult for most Americans even to imagine, but they are such qualities as stability, continuity, tradition, and a

rich and ancient heritage -- none of which, incidentally, do Americans consider important.

(3) The concept of "equality"

Equality is, for us, one of our most cherished institutions. This concept is so important for Americans that we have even given it a religious basis. To us, all people are equal. It would be difficult, indeed, to prove this purely from the physical evidence. We look around us and see people born with handicaps of all sorts, or we see people with less than half the intelligence we possess, or we see people in every conceivable condition of wretchedness, yet we believe religiously "that all people are equal."

This concept certainly makes Americans unique.

Seven-eighths of the world feels quite differently. To them, rank and status and authority are much more desirable conditions -- even if they happen to find themselves near the bottom of the social heap. It gives people in those societies a sense of security and certainty we are likely never to know. There is something reassuring in knowing, from birth, who you are and where you fit into the complex system we call "society". There is something rewarding, too, in realizing that the services you render are indispensable to that very society.

Seven-eighths of the world's people don't seem to mind showing deference and respect to someone of a higher position the way Americans do.

I have not dealt here with concepts as alien,to Americans, as karma or reincarnation, but you can imagine the far-reaching implications of such beliefs.

3. The Generic vs. Specific Argument. Of the seven issues mentioned in this paper, this is the one which has stirred the inner circles of cross-cultural trainers for a longer time than any of the others. I am happy to report that there is very little discussion of this once-important issue today. There is now general agreement that both are necessary, and even fairly general agreement as to the best order to present these two essential components of cross-cultural training.

The wisdom of this more generous view can easily be seen if one thinks of the generic training as "cross-cultural awareness training" and of the specific training as a "country-specific orientation" (or as "area studies" at its best). Then it seems obvious that both are essential.

It is now generally accepted that we should begin with the generic component, to lay the basic foundation. Many trainers even prefer to begin by creating an awareness of what American culture is and how we have all been enculturated as Americans (while others were being enculturated as Greeks or Turks or Japanese).

After this foundation has been laid, other cultures might be contrasted with the American, in a general way, and finally the training program would focus, in ever-increasing detail, on the target country and its indigenous culture.

One further observation is in order before we proceed to the next issue. It is possible, probably even desirable, to provide the generic training here in the U.S. before departing for the foreign country, but it is really impossible to give the specific training before arrival in the host country. Trainees seem incapable of imagining the differences before they actually encounter them.

4. The Content vs. "Process" Argument. This argument is an issue only in that too many cross-cultural trainers feel that process is so all-important that they ignore content altogether. On the other hand, many educators act as though content should be the only concern and the way in which that content is delivered is of little importance. This is the area in which both training and education could learn from the other discipline.

Trainers make the point that content is the easiest part to develop and that many people are able to provide that content. Also, the content, no matter how well developed, will never be gotten across to the trainees if no attention is paid to the process. Hence, process has assumed considerable emphasis in the training field. As important as process is, however, it cannot survive without the content; this is a point too many trainers fail to realize.

What we are calling "process" here has been derived from advances, over the past couple of decades, in group process and human relations work. Without them, there would be no "training" as we know it today. Two previous points are worth repeating:

(1) The role of the trainer should be that of a facilitator, coach, or guide;

(2) It is absolutely essential that every experiential exercise be "processed". This is best done in the small group context.

5. The Debate as to Whether Behavioral Objectives Can or Should Be Imposed onto Cross-Cultural Training. To this question, Peace Corps replies with a resounding, "Yes," and has been doing so with some success since 1972.

But many, perhaps most, individual trainers have grave doubts.

I, personally, think the process one goes through in developing training around behavioral or performance-based objectives is so worthwhile that it should be attempted whether the answer to the question is "yes" or "no".

I also believe it is possible, even if it is very difficult.

The "Cross-Cultural Preparedness Rating Sheet, which I developed in 1969, presents 42 sets of polar opposites (for a total of 84 points), all stated in performance terms. These are all items which can be observed during the course of the training program. *

*The process with which it is intended to be used is also very important. It is to be completed first by the trainee and then by the trainer, who fills one out for each trainee. Then the differences in perception become the basis for a private counseling session between the trainer and trainee.

6. Disincentives to Cross-Cultural Learning. Only two disincentives will be discussed in this paper.

(1) The trainees' demand for a list of "Do's and Don'ts" and their all-consuming need to have logistic questions answered ad infinitum. This is certain to create a problem when it is coupled with the trainers' absolute adamance against providing such information -- because this seems like such a "shallow" approach when they want to help the trainees "learn how to learn."

After trying it both ways many times, I am convinced it is best to give such information, to give it early on, and to get it out of the way so you can get on with the real learning -- even if it takes two full days. These needs, on the part of the trainees, are real, and they will not go away until they are satisfied. Unmet, they will simply impede the training process.

(2) The "all people are basicall, alike" cop-out. This "Mr. Magoo attitude" is very common and very destructive to cross-cultural understanding. (Mr. Magoo could travel to Finland, or Albania, or Morocco, or Afghanistan and never notice that he was out of the United States.)

Americans are threatened by differences. (All people aren't.) So we want to see similarities and to see all people as basically alike at the core. The human perceptual processes allow us to see whatever we want to see, so it is a "provable" precept to assume that all people are basically alike

and then to begin seeing evidence to support our claim. The only problem with such an assumption is that it makes cross-cultural learning most difficult, probably even impossible.

The only way I have found to combat this very common attitude in American trainees is to force them into and through a kind of culture shock in relation to their own American culture. This process takes some time, and it requires a carefully structured strategy which forces them to realize that one of the things which Americans hold nearest and dearest -- our belief in the sanctity of the individual -- is, in absolute terms, a hoax. (In relative terms, it is, of course, quite significant.) The trainees must be led to realize that we, who make so much of our individual differences and our individual rights, have been as much shaped by our culture as everyone else in the world; and that each culture's enculturation process shapes everybody differently; and that those differences are, indeed, very different -- especially if you find yourself in the middle of culture shock in an alien land.

7. The Need for Materials Development. The need for materials for trainers to use is both urgent and massive. It is nothing short of miraculous that trainers have been able to accomplish so much with so few resources. There are needs for training exercises and for materials for both generic and specific training (although most materials which have already been developed have been for generic training).

Two recent attempts have been made to:

(1) Create an overall structure to present the scope of our developmental needs, and

(2) To publicize these needs to the researchers and materials developers, in the hope that they will produce the materials we need so desperately.

The first was a paper I developed for the Action Caucus at the December 1977 Convention of the Speech Communication Association.* The second was a brainstorming session of fifteen cross-cultural trainers at the February 1978 Conference of SIETAR.**

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The overall impression this paper should convey is that there is hardly a single, homogeneous direction to cross-cultural training as the field approaches its fifteenth birthday. What has not been conveyed, and should be, is the fervor with which individual trainers argue their convictions and the dedication they evidence in applying themselves so completely to the long hours required by a training program. There is a lot of spirit in the field, even something akin to missionary zeal. It is, without question, one of the most exciting arenas in intercultural communication today.

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*"A Practitioner's View of Research and Materials Development Needs for Training in Intercultural Relations"

**Reports of both of these sessions are available from ICA's Training and Development Division upon request.

THREE CASE STUDIES

of

CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING SITUATIONS

Developed by Robert Kohls
International Communication Agency
for the
Second Summer Conference on
Intercultural Communication
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

July 1976

PROBLEM SITUATION I

You have been appointed the Facilitator for a mixed group of Japanese and American trainers who are meeting on the West coast for an intensive one week program to discuss and define the essential similarities and differences between the two cultures.

The Japanese in the group seem very satisfied to listen to lectures which attempt to catalog the similarities and differences. They appear to be the only ones who are madly taking notes during such lectures. The more specific the lists they are able to produce, the happier they are with the session.

The Americans have become restive from what they think have been too many sessions of listening to long-winded experts. They are pressing for more open discussions and are suggesting ideas for experiential activities they want you to include in the schedule.

Whenever you've tried open discussions, only the Americans hold forth with their opinions and argue with each other, trying to persuade the group of the validity of their proposed theories. The Japanese sit quietly through such sessions as if they should wait to be called upon before participating. But no one calls upon them.

The Americans are so interested in arguing their points of view that they seem not to have noticed the one-sidedness of the participation.

You're well aware of the two very different modes of operating, and you'd like to find some way to facilitate real communication between the two groups, but you don't know what to suggest.

You've called together a special planning session composed of three of the more articulate Japanese and three of the more sensitive Americans to discuss the problem and to brainstorm solutions.

PROBLEM SITUATION II

You are in charge of a one-week "Orientation to America" program for 25 foreign graduate students newly arrived from 20 different countries in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. You and your assistant have planned what you consider to be an exciting, involving program. Its heavy emphasis on experiential learning techniques has been designed to get the trainees out into the community so they can learn from their actual experiences.

The program has just begun, and you are somewhat troubled. In your estimation, your first meeting, which you had planned as a group discussion (in which you had hoped to gain the commitment of all the trainees) fell flat. Only the students from Western Europe and India became involved to a degree you had wanted. The East Asian and Southeast Asian students were particularly quiet. The African students looked as though they didn't know what was going on.

You are trying to figure out what you can do to activate those who are the most shy. What will you try?

PROBLEM SITUATION III

You are an experienced American teacher-trainer who became very excited when you learned you would become involved in your first overseas training adventure--training a rather large group of 30 to 40 year old male Egyptian middle school teachers in Cairo.

Now that you are two weeks into the six-week training program, you're not so happy you came. Things are not going at all well. You've tried everything you can think of -- roleplay (your specialty), case studies (you even tried to get them to write up their own problem experiences as case studies so they would be realistic enough), and several different group exercises which have always worked so well with your American student teachers.

The group seems particularly uncooperative and surly. Even when you publicly and persistently urge one of them to respond, he reluctantly and half-heartedly gives only a minimal grunt or nod of his head.

Privately, several of the members have come to ask you when the teaching is going to begin. When you replied, "It's already begun; this is a new approach. I'm not going to be lecturing to you," they seemed confused. Some of them even became openly critical. Now the open hostility within the group frightens you.

You are convinced there is more than ample experience within the group which all would benefit from if you could only find some way to get them to loosen up and share their knowledge and experience.

You've tried everything you can think of, and you're exhausted. One more request for a lecture, and you're likely to explode!

What will you try next?

QUESTIONS FOR FACILITATOR TO ASK:

I. Similarities in the 3 cases?

Essential differences in the 3 cases?

II. State the "problem" in each case in a simple sentence.

III. What is the composition of each group?

Where will the participants work after the program is over?

What is the group's expectations of the program?

How does the group expect the leader to act?

In each situation, who are the foreigners?

IV. What would you suggest as "solutions" for each case?

V. Ideal training program for each?

VI. For which <u>one</u> of the three situations does the experiential approach seem justified, and why?

* * * * * * * * *

[Answer: Situation II -- Because the group is being trained to function in the U.S.]